

MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY CULTURAL VALUE AND SERVICE QUALITY

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between Masculine and Feminine culture and service quality expectations and perceptions among students at governmental Jordanian Universities. The literature is relatively silent in terms of examining this relationship in Jordanian universities. This research is guided by a conceptual model that is underpinned by theories of Hofstede (1984) cultural dimensions, and service quality drawn from management context. The findings reveal a new culture perspective that is critical in this context. This new perspective tied to the students' expectations, which are not affected by their culture, while their perception of service quality has been strongly affected by their culture of masculinity and femininity and shows a significant relationship. Thus, this study results expand the previous literature and present a better understanding to the academic institutions in Jordan and valuable information about this study sample characteristics. It may contribute to the academic field meeting the perception of students at Jordanian governmental universities, which may in turn contribute to presenting better service quality at the educational institutions in Jordan.*

Keywords: *Masculinity, Femininity, Cultural Value, Service quality, Jordan.*

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study include:

Determining the cultural values of students at Jordanian governmental universities.

Uncovering students' expectations and perceptions of the Jordanian governmental universities service quality.

By examining the two objectives, the study provides insights into the relationship between cultural values and the factors of service quality, expectations and perceptions among students in relation to the level of Jordanian governmental universities service quality, which has not been discussed in business and marketing service literatures. Thus, the study makes a significant contribution to these bodies of literature. In addition, it is envisaged that the outcome of this study may provide practical value to the academic sector by providing useful managerial

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recommendations to service providers who provide academic and educational services to local and international students.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, Culture is considered as a major factor that affects the business of services. It shows in what way individuals perceive the external world and determines what they might do (Sultan, Parves and Wong 2013). However, it has faced various challenges (World Bank 2009). In developing countries like Jordan, these challenges are present beside a general level of socio-economic pressure and lower output rate when compared to developed countries (World Bank 2009). The higher education sector plays a vital role in boosting the economy (World Bank 2009). Several issues have affected this sector such as the lack of research and development, the lack of qualified staff at both operational and managerial levels, high staff turnover rates and the lack of employees' training (USAID 2013). In the meantime, Jordan higher education sector saw 236,000 thousand students in both public and private universities (MOHE 2014). The public universities as a result have figured ten universities. While, the number of private universities has reached seventeen, and the two years diploma level has recorded fifty one community colleges, this is beside to the World Islamic Sciences and Education University (MOHE 2014). Jordan institutions have become one of the major destinations in the region for obtaining a higher education, especially for the Arab Gulf countries. Indeed, 28 thousand foreign students from the total of 236 thousand are studying at the Jordanian universities, and the majority of them are coming from Arab Gulf countries (MOHE 2014). The higher education sector in Jordan is evolved significantly in recent years. However, still a major role is expecting to be played from the higher education system in Jordan to continue a rapid growth at the knowledge based economy levels (World Bank 2009). Some problems still need to be considered in the higher education sector in Jordan such as the quality of education and its services. Therefore, Jordanian higher education sector and the government of Jordan have to make sure that the education quality and the level of services given at the universities can help the new students to participate effectively either nationally and internationally. The higher education sector is made up of typical service firms offering individual service for students from different countries.

As global competition increases, understanding the cultural influences of service becomes a more critical issue for service firms (e.g., Ayoun and Moreo 2008; Riddle 1992). Moreover, because service encounters are primarily social, rules and expectations related to service encounters should be significantly different according to the culture they take place in (e.g., Alden, Wayne D, and Chol Lee 1993; Aramberri 2008; Czepiel 1990). Consequently, today's higher education institution managers as part of the service sector should be aware of their ability

to influence service culture and the impact on the sustainability and survival of educational service firms (Sarhan 2010). Indeed, the nature of service sector which depends on the human communication may highly be influenced by the cultural backgrounds of the individuals which significantly affect the shape of service standards provided to the customer, which determine the possible gap between the service receiver expectations and perceptions towards the service quality level. Thus, the students' practices in the higher education are human actions related to their expectations and perceptions, which are a direct reflection of one's cultural backgrounds and values.

In conclusion, student's expectation and perception towards universities service quality are strongly related to their culture. The literature is relatively silent when examining the relationship between cultural values of masculinity and femininity and service quality expectations and perceptions of students at Jordanian Governmental universities. Hence this research will examines this relationship.

Culture and Dimension of Masculinity and Femininity

Culture has been defined as collective programming of the mind that each individual carries, which consecutively affects people behavior to be different from each other (Hofstede 1984). This definition confirms that culture is a complicated issue and not easily obtained (Hofstede 1984). Therefore, culture is considered as a complex concept that includes many factors such as individual norms, values and beliefs which in total shape individual culture and differentiate a particular group of people behavior from others (e.g., Dedic and Pavlovic 2011; Pizam and Reichel 1997). Similarly, Schwartz (1994, p.2) confirmed in his definition of culture that is 'the rich complex meanings, beliefs, practices, symbols, norms and values prevalent among people in a society'. The seminal work of culture consist of four dimensions uncertainty avoidance, individualism and collectivism, power distance, and masculinity and femininity offered by Hofstede (1980) on the national level, is considered as an important source for the international cultural studies (Triandis 2004). Late Hofstede and Bond (1988) proposed a fifth dimension of time orientation. Hofstede (1991) and others such as Triandis *et al.* (1988) approved that similarity between the individuals in the same society may be substantial.

Consequently, it will be expected to find Individuals who have same national culture show different attitudes (Dedic and Pavlovic 2011). Triandis *et al.* (1985) examined the relationship between the individualism and collectivism at individual level and proposed that there are a significant differences between the people who have the same culture and living in the same geographic area. Robert *et al.* (1999) proposed that examining culture at the individual level may give an opportunity to find out whether people whose cultural attitudes are dissimilar to the majority culture they live in behave in a different way from people who live in culture which is consistent with their attitudes. For the purpose of this study, the dimension

of masculinity vs. femininity will be measured at an individual level. Hofstede (1980, p.420) defined masculinity culture as “a situation in which the dominant values in society are success, money, and things”, however, femininity culture can be defined as “a situation in which the dominant values in society are caring for others and the quality of life”. Cultures high on masculinity are focusing more on ownership-oriented, and individuals are like to own things such as expensive watches, high quality clothes (Smith *et al.* 1998) and prestige cars in the Arab world. Therefore, individuals in high masculinity culture have tough traits such as assertiveness, achievement, competition and authority. Sultan, Parves and Wong (2013) proposed that people in masculinity culture shows less concern about the welfare of other people and performance. On the other hand, people in high feminine culture are more concerned about the cooperation with others, looking for friendly environment. Thus, they are less likely to encounter and conflict with others (Sultan, Parves and Wong 2013). Triandis (1995) proposed that at the individual level, cultural values and dimensions can vary from high to low. This research paper is trying to extend the previous work by examining the cultural dimension of masculinity and femininity at an individual level with a high masculinity and low society culture as proposed by Hofstede (1980) and Triandis (1995). Number of studies confirmed that an individual within a culture does not have to share the same perspective as the majority of people in the society (e.g., Clugston, Howell, and Dorfman 2000; Cross and Madson 1997; Dorfman and Howell 1988; Dwyer, Mesak, and Hsu 2005; Vitell, Paolillo and Thomas 2003).

Clugston, Howell, and Dorfman (2000) confirmed that when exploring the culture differences between the people, it is necessary for the researchers to measure individual perceptions of culture to find out the level of variance between the people within the same culture. Moreover, examining culture at individual level may increase the researcher understanding of the relationship between individual culture and subculture and how that affects the differences between individual components like expectations and perceptions towards services. Bockner and Hesketh (1994) proposed that researchers when using the culture dimensions as independent variables, the measurement used must be at the same level of analysis as the dependent variables which in this case are the service quality expectations and perceptions. In this study, Hofstede’s (1980) work has been used as a theoretical background to examine the relationship between the culture dimension of masculinity and femininity and expectations and perception of service quality in the context of Jordanian governmental universities students. Despite the fact that Hofstede’s cultural work has received criticism, his work is still one of the most widely used cultural studies in international marketing and management (e.g., Laroche et al. 2004; Sodergaard 1994). To overcome the criticism has been proposed to Hofstede’s work especially on the individual level, Dorfman and Howell (1988) items will be used for this research, because they extended this line of inquiry by

developing scales assessing all four of Hofstede's dimensions at the individual level. Dorfman and Howell (1988) scale were developed and refined, with acceptable reliability for the Hofstede's four dimensions which is above 0.7. Regarding construct validity, relationships between individual level culture constructs were similar to those obtained using Hofstede's society level measures (Robert *et al.* 1999).

Service Quality and Its Dimensions (SERVQUAL)

Recently, Service quality in the higher education field has been the main area of research interest to academic and practitioner's researchers (Sultan, Parves and Wong 2013). Service quality can be defined as the gap between customer expectations and perceptions of service quality. It is an attitude that results from the customer's perceptions of service in relation to his/her expectations of services (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Malhotra 2005). This definition consists of two sides of service quality which are expectations and service perceptions. Expectations can be defined as a combination of a customer's predictions about what is likely to happen during a service transaction as well as the wants and desires of that customer (e.g., Oliver 1980; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1988). Service perceptions describe a customer's global judgments or attitudes, which relate to the superiority of a service (e.g., Oliver 1980; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1988). For the purpose of this research, the expectations and perceptions definition proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) is used. Numbers of studies have demonstrated that higher education service quality is important to be evaluated by students to show the cultural differences they have and its impact on their expectations and perceptions in relation to service quality of higher education institutions (e.g., Angell, Heffernan, and Megicks 2008; Sultan, Parves, and Wong 2013). In all higher education systems at any institutions, students are interested in service quality they received from the academic side (e.g., Angell, Heffernan, and Megicks 2008; Gatfield, Barker, and Graham 1999; Rojas-Méndez *et al.* 2009). However, other studies focused on the administrative side of service quality (e.g., LeBlanc and Nguyen 1997; Kwan and Ng 1999) and little studies considered the academic and administrative sides of service quality (Abdullah 2006; Sultan and Wong 2011). These studies focused on examining the cultural differences in terms of four cultural dimensions that involve (power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity), and their impact on students perceived service quality. The results of the previous studies proposed that different cultures perceive different academic and administrative service quality, and confirmed that physical facilities of service quality are very important to the students at any academic institutions (Sultan and Wong 2011). Obviously, few of the previous researchers examined the culture dimensions and their impact on the both academic and administrative sides. Most of the studies were conducted in the western context

like UK, USA, Canada, and Australia universities. Some studies were conducted in Malaysia, China, Japan universities. However, none of these studied examined the relationship between the culture differences and service quality expectations and perceptions in the Arab context in general and Jordan in particular. Therefore, this study will try to fill the gap in the literature by doing more research in to examine this relationship, and by extending the previous literature by conducting the study in the Arab world.

The Relationship between Masculinity and Femininity and Service Quality Expectations and Perceptions

Hofstede (1980) proposed that the individual is likely to belong to the leading society cultural group and acts in accordance with what is expected from him/her (Hofstede, 1980). Furrer, Liu, and Sudharshan (2000) confirmed that individual perception of service quality differs across cultural groups. Cultural dimension of masculinity and femininity concentrations on the degree of people highlights accomplishment from one side and on the other side focusing on the nurture and caring (Schumann *et al.* 2010). It has been agreed that the key role of culture is to differentiate a group of people from one another and that culture is a way of life that shapes people's behavior (Hofstede, Jonker, and Verwaart 2008; Inglehart, Baker, and Map 2003; Javidan *et al.* 2006; Schwartz 2003; Triandis 2008). Hofstede (1991) proposed that people with masculinity cultures tend to perceive large and fast things as attractive (Hofstede 1991). Therefore, one can notice in the Arab world, where the masculinity culture is high, that people always judge the good service as fast as they receive it and consider it bad as late as to be received (Sarhan 2010). Thus, service quality is considered good when physical buildings and systems are grand. Similarly, it has been considered right when people can get the response fast and their problems can be managed in a little period of time. In contrast, people in feminine culture society have more compassion for the weak than the masculine people, and have ability to perceive little and slow things as attractive. A considerable research has been undertaken in the area of cultural values differences and service quality. Many studies have confirmed the relationships between culture and service quality (e.g., Crotts and Erdmann 2000; Patterson and Mattila 2008; Reimann, Lunemann, and Chase 2008; Reisinger and Turner 2002; Sultan, Parves, and Wong 2013; Ueltschy *et al.* 2004). Culture is based on thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and way of thinking (e.g., Bhagat *et al.* 2002; Hofstede 2002; Hofstede, Jonker, and Verwaart 2008; Huff and Smith 2008). Thus, the individual's actions depends on his/her expectations and perceptions based on such thoughts and beliefs. Sultan, Parves, and Wong (2013) proposed that customers who belong to the feminine society culture have ability to collaborate with other people and like to interact with others in the society and to search on the enjoyable learning environment. Furrer, Liu, and Sudharshan (2000), confirmed that service

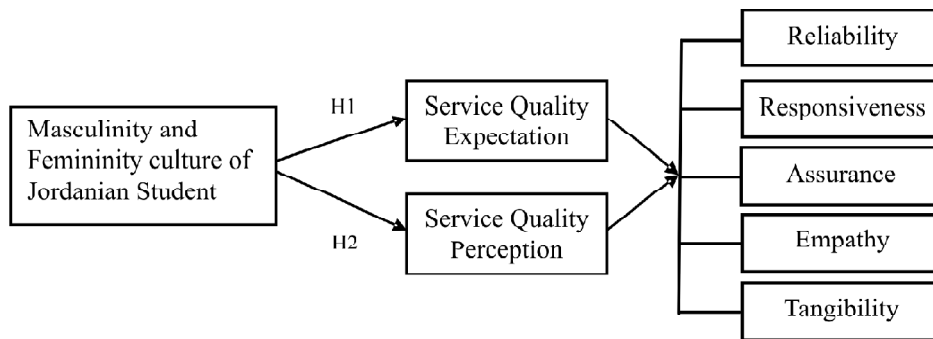
provider gender may show a big difference in the service quality perception of the customer. Obviously, the previous studies confirmed that masculine and feminine cultures maintain such vast differences in the services business. Based on the literature two hypotheses can be derived as follow:

- H1: There is a significant relationship between masculinity and femininity culture with service quality expectations.
- H2: There is a significant relationship between masculinity and femininity culture with service quality perceptions.

A Conceptual Model of the Study

Based on the literature and utilising two established scales with reliable track records, the researchers developed the study’s conceptual model in order to examine the relationship between cultural dimension of masculinity and femininity and each factor of service quality expectations and perceptions. Service quality expectations and perceptions are measured by using the five dimensions of service quality (tangible, empathy, assurance, reliability, and responsiveness). The SERVQUAL scale was used to reveal tourist expectations and perceptions, and to uncover the gap between them (Parasuraman., Zeithaml and Berry 1991).

Figure 1: A Conceptual Model of Culture and Service Quality Expectation and Perception



METHODOLOGY

In order to measure the relationship between cultural dimension of masculinity and femininity and each factor of service quality expectations and perceptions, a quantitative method has been performed by utilizing quantitative questionnaires as explained in the following section.

Research Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire is used in this research. Hofstede’s (1980 and 1984) culture dimension of masculinity and femininity theory is used as a

foundation for this research. Fernandez, *et al.* (1997) suggested that Dorfman and Howell's (1988) used and developed the measurement of Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions items. They approved that the new scale of Dorfman and Howell's (1988) is psychometrically more reliable than Hofstede's (1984) scale on the individual level. Thus, this research performed Dorfman and Howell's (1988) new measure of Hofstede's (1984) dimension items. The dimension of masculinity and femininity culture was measured by using a scale consisting of six items which was developed by Dorfman and Howell (1988). The results of this research show that the internal consistency of masculinity and femininity items was above 0.7 which is acceptable according to Nunnally's (1967); Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) standard. To measure service quality five dimensions of expectations and perceptions, SERVQUAL instrument with 22 items were used and showed a high internal consistency of each scale of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility. According to the results of the reliability analysis of this research, all of the expectations and perceptions scales were above 0.7 which met Nunnally's (1967); Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) standard. All measures were anchored on a seven point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

Data Collection and Sampling

Data were collected from students of the top three Jordan public universities as ranked by Webometrics (2014) and were approved from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHE). The three universities are Jordan University, Science and Technology University, and Hashemite University. Six hundred questionnaires were distributed from which two hundred and twenty two valid questionnaires were returned with a response rate of (40.5%). Approximately 54.3% of participants are male and about 45.7% of the participants are female. The average age for participants between 18 - 21 years old is 45.2% and 21 - 24 is 40.5%. The majority of the participants are in bachelor education level with 96.7%. The average years studying level was third year with 29%.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research revealed interesting outcomes by uncovering that there is no significant relationship between culture value of masculinity and femininity and service quality of expectations. These findings do not support the first hypothesis which proposed that there is a significant relationship between culture value of masculinity and femininity and service quality of expectations. The results of the current study confirmed that student expectations towards the university service quality are do not affected by factor of masculinity and femininity culture. This result is consistent with Kueh and Ho Voon (2007) research, who measured the undergraduate student expectations towards restaurant service quality based on Malaysian culture and proposed that masculinity dimension, did not show a

significant relationship with any of service quality expectations five factors of tangibles, reliability, empathy responsiveness, and assurance. These results are consistent with the findings of Sarhan (2010); Tsaur, Lin, and Wu (2005); Tsoukatos and Rand (2007), who proposed that the customers who are successful, capable and ambitious and looking for the achievement in the society, have low service quality expectations of responsiveness. This result indicates that the students at the Jordanian governmental universities who are carrying a culture value of achievement, do not have expectations towards university academic and administrative staff and they think that the university academic and administrative staff will not give prompt service to them, will not be ready to respond to their request and will not always be willing to help them. Thus, it can be concluded from the current study results that the students at Jordanian universities are willing to be at the university regardless of the quality of service provided to them. This explains the Jordanian individual culture that is focusing on the achievements in his or her life path regardless of the quality of services they will receive. On the other hand, the results showed that there is a significant relationship between culture value of masculinity and femininity and service quality of perceptions as shown in table 1. This result support the second hypothesis which proposed that there is a significant relationship between the previous variables as proposed in the literature. This result is consistent with the findings of Kueh and Ho Voon (2007); Sarhan (2010); Sultan, Parves and Wong (2013), who confirmed that the culture dimension of masculinity and femininity has an impact on the five factors of service quality perceptions and there is a significant relationship with the five perception factors of tangibles, reliability, empathy responsiveness, and assurance. The current research findings found that culture dimension of masculinity and femininity has highly positive impact on the student perception towards governmental university service quality of reliability. This result reveals that students who are belonging to the masculine culture are more willing to accept to deal with the university academic and administrative staffs who are dependably handling with student service problems. Whereas, these results have contradiction with Furrer, Liu and Sudharshan (2000) and Liu, Furrer, and Sudharshan (2001) who found that there is a negative relationship between customers who belong to masculine society culture and their perceptions towards the service quality level.

The current results demonstrate that Jordanian university students who belong to masculinity culture presented higher perceived service quality in terms of empathy than tangibility dimension as shown in table 1. This means that students prefer academic and administrative staff that give personal attention and understand the specific needs more than physical issues such as modern building or providing them with the internet services at the university. Students are looking for the physical facilities as a normal requirement to be available at the university, while they are seeing other factors of service quality perception of reliability,

empathy, and responsiveness more important by registering higher scores than tangible factor as shown in table 1. This reflects their masculine culture and how it affects positively their perceived quality evaluations towards quality of service provided at the Jordanian governmental universities.

Table 1
Correlations of Cultural Dimension of Masculinity and Femininity and Service Quality Expectations and Perceptions of Jordanian Governmental University Students (N=210)

	<i>SQE</i> <i>Reliability</i>	<i>SQE</i> <i>Responsiveness</i>	<i>SQE</i> <i>Assurance</i>	<i>SQE</i> <i>Empathy</i>	<i>SQE</i> <i>Tangibility</i>
Masculinity and Femininity	.112 .106	.113 .102	-.028 .685	.032 .644	-.003 .964
	<i>SQP</i> <i>Reliability</i>	<i>SQP</i> <i>Responsiveness</i>	<i>SQP</i> <i>Assurance</i>	<i>SQP</i> <i>Empathy</i>	<i>SQP</i> <i>Tangibility</i>
Masculinity and Femininity	.355** .000	.321** .000	.273** .000	.324** .002	.320** .005

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study examined the relationship between masculinity and femininity culture and service quality expectations and perceptions. The results proposed that students' culture has no effect on their expectations of service quality towards Jordanian governmental universities but has a significant relationship with their perception of service quality presented at the Jordanian universities. These results demonstrated that students' cultural values may be different from other individuals in the Jordanian society. Most of the previous studies in the literature proposed that students who belong to the masculine culture are more interested in the service quality of tangible (Abdullah 2006; Angell, Heffernan, and Megicks 2008; Gatfield, Barker, and Graham 1999; Rojas-Mendez *et al.*, 2009). Whereas, this present study approved that the culture of those students from strong masculinity culture as identified by Hofstede (1980), may be started to be changed to be less strong in masculine culture over the time which was demonstrated in the study of Wu (2006) who proposed that people culture may change from time to time. Thus, those students have perceived service quality of reliability and empathy as more important than tangibility services. Therefore, this study extended the previous literature of culture and service quality by presenting these results from the Arab world. These results have conveyed an important understanding to the higher education field of students' cultural communication in the educational institutions. Future researchers need to discover the importance of understanding the student's culture at educational context to know the best way to communicate with the students by presenting a high quality of services at the educational institutions in the Arab world.

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